UNITED NATIONS **A**

General Assembly

Distr.
LIMITED

A/CONF.164/L.22
22 July 1993

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON
STRADDLING FISH STOCKS AND
HIGHLY MIGRATORY FISH STOCKS
New York, 12-30 July 1993

COMMENTS ON PRECAUTIONARY MANAGEMENT OF FISHERIES

(Submitted by the delegation of Sweden)

1. The precautionary approach to the protection of the environment has been formalized in principle 15 of the Rio Declaration of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. The text can also be used as a general guideline in fisheries. However, in fisheries, specific risk assessments need to be considered further.

2. Fisheries have to be managed in a cautious manner. There has been a misconception about such management and there is an impression that it would immediately mean the imposition of drastic measures. This is certainly not the case. A moratorium, for example, is necessary only in extreme cases.

3. Precautionary management is basically very different from the application of the precautionary principle in pollution issues, e.g., when toxic substances are added to the water. It was in order to deal with such non-natural additions that the precautionary principle was created and it has subsequently been used, for example, in Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs).

4. In fisheries the meaning of precautionary management has to be defined, in order that it does not remain a tool which no one knows how to use. As you may know, there is already a precautionary approach in the form of a code of practice established by the European Inland Fisheries Advisory Commission and the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea. The code relates to the introduction of alien species into coastal waters and fresh waters (for reference see the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations paper entitled "International Code of Conduct for Responsible Fishing").

5. There is obviously a need to identify appropriate methods to deal with uncertainties in the assessment and management of fish stocks, in order

(a) To maintain a healthy state of fish stocks;

(b) To maintain the biodiversity of the waters.

The practical implications of any application of the precautionary approach to fisheries have to be carefully examined.

6. What kind of precautionary management measures are presently used? One could say that they are a combination of biological and socio-economic measures, such as:

(a) Step wise development of fisheries;

(b) Financial or international brakes to avoid explosive development of fisheries;

(c) Total allowable catches (TACs) based on experience in similar cases;

(d) Multi-species management on a trial basis;

(e) Targets below maximum sustainable yield (MSY) or related concepts;

(f) "Safe biological build" concept;

(g) Minimum spawning mass;

(h) Total ecosystem management on a trial basis;

and a number of other concepts.

7. Conservation and management of the living resources of the high seas must be based on scientific work, as elaborated in article 119 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Science involves a continuous revision of knowledge and therefore approaches to the precautionary management of fisheries will have to be continuously revised. Frequent revisions, including adequate risk assessment, will add to the creditability of the approach.

8. In this context, all efforts have to be made to use adequate basic scientific data. Since important economic interests are involved, any unfortunate tendency that may be found to the withholding or distortion of data must be vigorously counteracted.

9. Sweden attaches great importance to the precautionary management of fisheries and will closely follow further developments in this field. We also think, along with others, that the application of the precautionary approach to fisheries will become more important as more fish stocks are exploited and as research funds for traditional stock assessment become limited. How the precautionary approach could best be implemented in fisheries needs to be further discussed by scientists in this field and a recommendation on this subject from this Conference would help in finding the means necessary for such an exercise.